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TAGS: [PTER](#) [MOPS](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [RP](#)  
SUBJECT: A PROVINCIAL VIEW OF THE COMMUNIST INSURGENCY

REF: MANILA 609

Classified By: Pol/C Scott Bellard, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (SBU) Summary. Communist forces remained active in Bulacan province, but military and police efforts, together with relative prosperity, increasingly limit their sphere of influence. Police in particular face an overall lack of resources. Civil-military relations and the overall human rights situation appear to have improved following a 2006 change in the military command. End summary.

New People's Army Thin on the Ground but Active  
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12. (SBU) During a recent consular outreach mission to Bulacan province in Central Luzon, embaff met with officials and others to discuss the local implications of the long-standing Communist insurgency of the New People's Army (NPA). According to provincial officials of the Philippine National Police (PNP), as of early 2007 the NPA in Bulacan could muster only an estimated 300 regular (full-time) and another 200 "part-time" guerrillas. There has reportedly been no increase of Bulacan's NPA cadres in the last five years. PNP Col. Ronaldo de Jesus commented that the guerrillas preferred to operate along the province's boundaries, because the PNP was reluctant to engage in "hot pursuit" across provincial borders, and even had difficulty coordinating between police districts. Col. de Jesus admitted that the result was greater freedom by the NPA to maneuver to neighboring Pampaga and Quezon provinces, while maintaining little geographic depth. The NPA's very mobility, however, meant that it dominated perhaps only one of Bulacan's hundreds of "barangays" (townships). Even without a full-time presence, NPA cadres nonetheless continued to extort "revolutionary taxes" from local landowners -- especially fish farmers, who were particularly vulnerable due to their relative isolation in coastal areas. De Jesus noted that few NPA regulars were Bulacan natives, which Bulacan Governor Jessie de la Cruz separately speculated was likely due to Bulacan's relative prosperity.

Separate Roles for PNP and AFP  
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13. (SBU) PNP resources are limited in combating the NPA. According to the chief of Task Force Lingap Col. Gatchalian, total PNP strength in Bulacan numbered a little over 1,000, most lightly armed and with limited transport capabilities. In Guiguinto town, there were only 27 officers for a population of 73,000. PNP pursued murder charges against the NPA whenever possible, but getting witnesses and evidence to solve cases remained problematic, according to Col Gatchalian and other PNP officers. Accordingly, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) had the lead on counterinsurgency efforts in Bulacan, notably the 703rd Brigade and attached 57th Infantry Battalion, both subordinate to the 7th Infantry Division. According to Col. Gatchalian, the AFP's more

recent strategy of staying in an area for six months or more has had a positive effect, leading civilians to feel less inclined to cooperate with the NPA. Officials admitted that the success of this strategy has been largely dependent on the individual commander and his relations with the civilian community.

#### A Role for the Church

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14. (C) Catholic Bishop of Bulacan Jose Oliveros told emboss that he actively promoted political neutrality, while noting that he felt free to voice his concerns with the government. To prevent his clergy from being targeted by the NPA (or the AFP), he said that he frequently reminded the clergy of the importance of maintaining political neutrality. Among the 240 Catholic clergy in his bishopric, two were politically active leftists, including one who was a formal member of the party-list group "Bayan Muna." Bishop Oliveros said that he had strongly urged the two to renounce their involvement with political causes, but at least one of his priests had received death threats in 2006. The Bishop added that he had also requested the AFP to refrain from using Catholic chapels to deliver lectures to the public about the Communist insurgency, as well as indirectly requesting the NPA also to stop using churches for overnight refuge. Both sides have now complied, according to the Bishop. However, he admitted that the Church continued to offer occasional sanctuary for individuals who have received death threats.

15. (C) Bishop Oliveros laid specific blame on now-retired AFP General Jovito Palparan, the previous commander of the 7th Infantry Division, for promoting unlawful killings as a counterinsurgency tactic. The Bishop described a "chilling"

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meeting with General Palparan in 2006, during which the general had claimed that killings were "sometimes necessary" to stop a "greater evil." Bishop Oliveros commented carefully that the AFP should take some responsibility for at least some of the unlawful killings.

#### Pressure to be "White"

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16. (C) Governor de la Cruz separately also criticized General Palparan, noting that she knew about his "track record" prior to becoming 7th Infantry Division commander. She said she had specifically warned him against using a similar strategy of targeting leftists in Bulacan. She lamented that civilian-military relations went to a new low during his tenure, and noted that ties vastly improved with the arrival of General Gomez as Region Three Commander. The governor underscored that disappearances and killings in Bulacan had abated quickly after General Palparan's departure in September 2006, an observation that she said statistics from the Philippine Commission on Human Rights (CHR) confirmed: 15 political killings and 13 involuntary disappearances during General Palparan's two year tenure as commander, with only two political killings and one disappearance in the six months following his retirement. Governor de la Cruz complained about being under political pressure to classify her province as "white," or clear of insurgent activity. Given continued NPA activity, and AFP counterinsurgency efforts against the NPA, she said that she would continue to refuse to do so.

17. (C) Comment: The NPA remains a deadly if declining presence in many provinces, despite the AFP's efforts to promote a greater "hearts and minds" component to its counterinsurgency operations. The litany of allegations against General Palparan are long-standing, but the Commission on Human Rights and the Melo Commission both concluded that there was a lack of solid evidence directly linking him to unlawful killings for any legal complicity. Chief of Staff General Esperon's February 4 directive

(reftel) reminding the AFP commanders of their chain-in-command responsibility vis-a-vis unlawful killings should strongly help to discourage possible acquiescence by AFP officers in their subordinates' involvement in such illegal acts.

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